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## SCIIONS OF ARISTOCRACY IN AMERICA.

BY HESTER DORSEY RICHARDSON, PRESIDENT OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS COMMISSION OF MARYLAND.

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THE sentiment of American equality was an outgrowth of the Revolutionary War and the patriotic spirit of frowning down all that smattered of Kings and coronets. Men who had worn the silk coat, satin breeches, jewelled buckles and curled wig of the Court Gentleman, donned homespun, flouted the wig, and discarded the use of the signet ring on legal documents. Jeffersonian simplicity was the first orchid that bloomed on the tree of American Independence.

The same spirit that caused our great-grandsires to erase the family arms from the ancestral plate, and throw the escutcheon in the fire, was responsible for the suppression of family history, since family history was regarded as tending to foster aristocratic ideas; for it must be remembered that, to be loyal to America, these old patriots denounced and renounced the King—and with him all things English—and, as their ancestors were loyal British subjects, *they* were given up with the allegiance.

As a result of this ruthless snapping of the ancestral chain which must forever bind Americans to the mother country, the nineteenth-century gentleman was far more interested in the pedigree of his horse or dog than in that of his children, and he knew much more about the age of his wine than of his family.

With the declaration of American equality the scramble for the American dollar began, which resulted in the supremacy of the successful rich; and as wealth is not always to the fit, we as a nation have lived to suffer to the third and fourth generations of those who tabooed pride of birth and laid upon us the stigma of an aristocracy of money. I say "stigma," for pride of birth is justifiable, since it is always based upon some service to King

or country which presupposes self-sacrifice or heroism, while pride of wealth is ignoble, since it is many times a monument to avarice or shrewdness, if not to chicanery.

With increased facilities for travel, rich Americans became globe-trotters, and soon began the international marriages between the beautiful American heiresses and the foreign nobility, in which all the world believed that the lovely Americans had only their wealth and beauty to barter for a title, and that *ancient lineage* was the one thing they lacked.

Whether or not it was because of the assumption by foreigners of social superiority, based upon descent from old and honorable families, or because of the natural swinging back of the pendulum which had gone too far in the universal ignorance of our progenitors, certain it is that Americans have at last stopped long enough in the struggle for pelf to learn if they are really so new as they have been painted.

That age has always been as desirable for family as for wine is too well known to need emphasis, and it is a happy sign of the times that Americans have swung away from the old idea that to be interested in one's ancestors was contrary to the spirit of American equality, for ignorance of our origin has not kept down inequalities in our social life, in which classes have always really been as distinctly marked as in any monarchy. In every State in the Union, a few families possessing wealth and influence have always been recognized as the "*first families*." Local historians have emphasized the official services of their forebears, until in each community a few names stand out as the peers of that especial realm.

Since the organization of the various patriotic societies, it has been found, through the original research which they have initiated, that no half-dozen men settled the country, served the King, fought against him, and founded the nation! The patriotic societies have, in breaking down the narrow worshipping of a few names, been in fact great levellers, and have opened the door to investigations which have been much further-reaching than their own.

The Colonial and Revolutionary organizations end their researches with the official services of early settlers in the formative period of our national life, or with the part taken in the War of Independence by the descendants of these first-comers. But the

same spirit which prompts the archaeologist to dig at Assos, Babylon or Nineveh, that moves the scientist to search through the various strata of the earth until he finds the fossils of the eocene period, has compelled the student of American history to grope through fading parchments in dim-lit vaults for light upon the *origin* of the Colonial settlers of America.

The American Historical Research Society, under the encouragement of the Carnegie Institute, has had its representatives in England, digging out from the unpublished British archives sources of American Colonial history. State legislation has taken up the question of the preservation of the Colonial records, and Commissions have been created to pass upon their condition and to recommend means of preserving them. All of which goes to show that the question of her early history has become a vital one to America.

It is with this same interest in our national history, based upon belief that in the lives of the people is written the history of the nation, that the writer turned her particular attention to the *origin* of our early settlers, her field of investigations to the present time having been mainly confined to original resources in Maryland and Virginia, the results of which have proven beyond peradventure that America has an aristocracy based upon lineage as ancient and honorable as any in Great Britain, because it is in many instances of the same blood as the English aristocracy itself. The finding of hundreds of original seals, bearing heraldic devices, attached to legal documents in the Colonial period has fixed the status of these early settlers as gentlemen of quality.

Being familiar with the evidences of an early aristocracy in this country, in the survivals of old mansions and ancient manor houses—of the great hereditary estates which have preserved family names in certain localities as inseparable from the land as in feudal England—the writer has for years been convinced that it was simply lack of investigation which kept us in ignorance of a past history as full of interest and renown as that enjoyed by our British cousins. Tombstones in isolated family burying-grounds on remotely situated estates have, with their coats of arms and memorial inscriptions, told of the honorable lineage of some early Cavalier in Maryland or Virginia. Book-plates and silver, bearing family arms, when such had not been ruthlessly

destroyed, have been the evidences of claims to ancient lineage in many families; but the *proof* of descent from definite English houses had been long since lost; and tradition without verification, other than circumstantial evidence of decayed relics of Colonial affluence, was all that remained to give us a clue in our investigations. Legal evidence alone can bear the test of authority. The English standard must be the American standard in a matter of this kind.

Therefore we must turn to Sir William Dugdale, Garter Principal King of Arms, who, in the middle of the seventeenth century, set a rule by which armorial bearings were confirmed. In the Lansdowne Manuscript we find, under date of June 15th, 1668, this Sir Knight declaring:

“It is incumbent that a man doe look over his own evidences for some seals of armes, for perhaps it appears in them, and if soe and they have used it from the beginning of Queen Elizabeth’s reigne, or about that time, I shall allow thereof, for our directions are limiting us soe to doe and not a shorter prescription of usage.”

Realizing then that arms borne in the American Colonies by British subjects after that date could only be legitimately used, as Dugdale’s *dictum* was in force on both sides of the water, I turned my attention to the search for such legal evidences in Maryland and Virginia.

From one ancient depository to another I went, and, in damp old vaults, mouldering and mildewed and falling into rapid decay, I have found the legally used seals of hundreds of the early families of Maryland and Virginia. The use of the signet ring in Colonial America has, therefore, happily forever sealed the status of those early adventurers who brought with them these evidences of their descent.

Lest some question might arise as to the value of these seals as proofs of descent from families of the same names bearing the identical arms in England, I laid the evidences before Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, K.C.B., Director-General of the British Museum, with the request that he submit it to the best authority in England. Promptly the response came back: “I beg to say that I think you may accept the arms and crests used by persons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as authentic.” This, added to the opinion of one high in authority at Washington, that “the King himself will no doubt be highly interested in the dis-

covery of these heraldic seals of the English settlers," has lent a definitely international interest to this find so valuable to thousands of Americans who directly descend from these Colonial gentlemen.

It will soon be three hundred years since the earliest settlers stepped with adventurous foot from the staunch little ships that first touched our shores, and therefore it is only the antiquarian who has kept informed about the things of that far-off time. Burke has even forgotten us, and it is in the extinct and dormant Peerages and the sources known only to the student of English records, and from which Burke draws the information for his purposes, that we have found the identity of our gentlemen adventurers in the family lineages. Indeed, while the writer has gone, seal in hand, to the English records and proven the identity of many of the Colonial settlers, not more than one or two appear in Burke, who is therefore shown to deal with the present aristocracy, which, in a surprisingly large number of cases, is recorded as "created" in the nineteenth century.

Therefore, adding the three hundred years of our American descent to the families of ancient lineage which were flourishing during the reigns of King James, and of Charles I and Charles II, we may claim that American aristocracy is more ancient than the present British aristocracy in many cases.

Americans, however, have no desire to set up an hereditary aristocracy, even though they are pleased to use the coat armor of their ancient forebears. My observation convinces me that the average well-balanced American hangs his ancestral arms in his hall as an object-lesson to his children, just as he hangs the Revolutionary sword or medal of his great-grandsire as evidence of patriotic service at a later date than that for which the coat of arms stands. Both to his mind are emblems of achievement. Therefore, not having a Norroy to see that arms are properly used, every descendant of the parent stem, with true American independence, preserves the family coat armor as best pleases him.

It is the right of Americans, however, to have the truth known about those who founded the nation, and to be content no longer to occupy a position of inferiority in any particular in the mind of the world, either at home or abroad. The finding of these heraldic seals establishes the position of over five hundred of the early families of Colonial Maryland and Virginia, added

to which are the other evidences of the use of arms in these sections, the least of which are the mention of "escutcheons" in wills and inventories, "silver seals," "seal rings" and "plate" described as "marked with the family arms," increasing the number by many hundreds in the two colonies.

While this new find will prove a revelation to English-speaking people on both sides of the ocean, it should not really be surprising to those who have ever gone very deeply into our early history. The cause of such general ignorance regarding the status of the men who came into Maryland and Virginia is the fact that the mistakes of the ignorant early writers were repeated by the later pseudo-historians, who have taken statements at second hand and have written history without ever having given a day to original research.

The truth is that, during the turbulent reigns of Charles I and Charles II, England was much impoverished by her internal wars and political malversations, and expansion was her only salvation; and, while many emigrated in the name of religion to escape the persecutions which stalked broadcast in the mother country, hundreds came to the American colonies to better their temporal fortunes. Families were large three hundred years ago, and race suicide a crime unknown on either side of the ocean.

The law of primogeniture left the younger sons unprovided for; and hence hundreds of the representatives of Great Britain's best blood welcomed the chance to acquire estates in the new world. The "Conditions of Plantation," published by Cecilius Calvert at London, were particularly attractive to the land-hungry young gentlemen of the "Three Kingdoms," who eagerly availed themselves of the opportunity of founding great manors not unlike those enjoyed by the heir-at-law in England. The Virginia Company, including over two hundred and thirty titled gentlemen of the Court of King James and later of Charles I, had attracted much attention to the advantages of Virginia. Most of these courtiers, who had adventured money in the American enterprise, received patents for large tracts of land in the new country, and, while all did not come out, many came and others sent their sons over to "seat and plant."

These younger offshoots of great English families, like those in Maryland, transplanted into a new and virgin soil, grew in strength and virility, and became the progenitors of many of our

greatest statesmen, generals and jurists. This is particularly pleasing to the writer, because it bears out her theory that blood tells in a nation no less than in a species. A thoroughbred horse or dog does not spring from a mongrel, and a nation that attains greatness through achievement is but a fulfilling of the law that like produces like; and we are now proving, what we have always believed, that America the Great sprang from the best of a great parent stock, that the seed from which she grew was the seed of greatness.

This brings us to the question of classes in America, of which there are distinctly two—the first, the descendants of the Colonial settlers whose origin has been established, or can be, by the arms used by them in the Colonial period, from whom we claim our American aristocracy of birth and lineage, differing in no particular from that of England prior to the Revolution, when our ancestors on this side of the water were still loyal subjects of the King; and, second, the modern American descendants of the later-day immigrants, all sorts and conditions of men who have come from all parts of the world in search of American liberty, equality and gold.

When King Charles I gave the Charter of Maryland to Cecilius Calvert in the year 1632, he gave him royal rights and privileges, and encouraged him and many gentlemen of very good fashion to lay the foundation for a transplanted nobility across the sea, for he incorporated in the Charter the following:

“Now that the aforesaid region thus described may be *eminently* distinguished above all other regions of that territory, and decorated with more ample titles, know ye that we, of our special grace, certain knowledge and mere motion, have thought fit that the said regions and islands be erected into a Province, out of the plenitude of our royal power and prerogative, we do for us, our heirs and successors erect and incorporate the same into a Province, and nominate the same Maryland, by which name we will that it shall hereafter be called.

“Moreover, lest in so remote and far-distant region every access to honors and dignities may seem to be precluded and utterly debarred to *men well born, who are preparing to engage in the present expedition*, and desirous of deserving well both in peace and war of us and our Kingdom, for this cause for us, our heirs and successors, we do give full and plenary powers to the aforesaid now Baron of Baltimore, and to his heirs and assigns, to confer favors, rewards, honors upon such subjects inhabiting within the Province aforesaid as shall be well deserving, and to adorn them with whatsoever titles and dignities they shall appoint

(so that they be not such as are now used in England). We also by these presents do give and grant license to the Baron of Baltimore, and to his heirs, to erect any parcels of land within the Province aforesaid into Manors—to have and to hold court-baron and all things to which a court-baron do belong—and to have and to keep frank-pledge for the conservation of the peace and better government of those parts—by themselves and their stewards or by the Lords for the time being to be deputed of others of those manors when they shall be constituted, and in the same to exercise all things to the view of frank-pledge belonging."

It is shown by the above that Maryland was not a colony of England, but a Province in which the Barons of Baltimore were absolute Lords and Proprietaries, "saving always the faith and allegiance and sovereign dominion due to us, to have and to hold of us, our heirs and successors, Kings of England, as of our Castle at Windsor, in our county of Berks, in free and common socage by fealty only, for all services and not *in capite* nor by knights' service yielding therefor unto our heirs," *et cetera*, "two Indian arrows of those parts to be delivered at the said Castle of Windsor every year on Tuesday in Easter week."

That this tribute was paid for many years we have evidence, as receipts dated at Windsor Castle have recently been found and are now preserved in Maryland.

In his Palatinate, therefore, we find that Lord Baltimore had royal rights and privileges, license to erect courts, create judges, bestow titles and parcel lands into manors after the feudal custom.

As the land is the basis of aristocracy in all monarchical countries, it naturally became so here, as the King distinctly encouraged a transplanted nobility based on the English law of primogeniture and the bestowal of titles upon the deserving and well-born. Class distinctions were at once recognized in Maryland, and gentlemen were recorded as such. They were entitled to be addressed as "Esquire," and with their large estates corresponded to the gentry of England.

So much for the ancient régime which the renaissance of family history is now revealing at the hands of the original investigator, facts which have long been lost are being discovered, and their real value given to things which have been passed over as insignificant.

The social revolution which the legal proofs of an American aristocracy, founded on ancient lineage, will finally institute, is

not likely to be one of bloodshed, but one which will unite more firmly the feelings of kinship and affection toward which England and America have been steadily progressing for years. And, while the positive proofs exist that there are hundreds, aye thousands, of Americans who are descendants of the royal blood of England, none is likely to contest the claims of the throne with His Majesty King Edward VII. But such American descendants of noble British houses as can prove their lineage and show the requisite number of quarterings which would admit them to equal social rank with their titled foreign husbands, should not be deprived of this recognition of their aristocratic origin.

It is the American way to have the best of everything, and Americans have been accused of buying titles and even ancestors! But in the light of the original research which has for the first time directed attention to the *quality* of the Colonial settlers of America *as a class*, none need hope to assume forebears to whom they are not entitled, while others may find themselves with a lineage beyond the limits of their imagination.

In every Colonial State, there are no doubt as rich finds, in the way of legal evidences of noble British origin, as those which have rewarded the writer for her labors. The work of investigation must be carried on by the seeker after truth in every ancient capital, both North and South, before the whole story of our American Aristocracy can be told.

No higher tribute can be paid the men who, in settling this country, laid the foundation of the nation, than a rational investigation of their origin, and nothing can be more gratifying to the delver than to find the glint of good blood rather than the sombre marks of inferiority.

HESTER DORSEY RICHARDSON.